

Helen Clark's government has restricted the most basic right of workers – the right to strike

DEMAND YOUR RIGHTS!

According to the Council of Trade Unions, Labour's Employment Relations law is "more restrictive on industrial action than the Employment Contracts Act", National's hated law. And this is the judgement of union leaders who support the Labour Party.

**Read this leaflet and join
the fight for workers' rights.**

THE TIMES ARE CHANGING

● The most basic legal right of workers is the right to strike. Without the ability to strike, workers are powerless against profit-hungry corporates and power-mad governments.

● When Helen Clark's government passed the Employment Relations Act, workers weren't told the truth. We weren't told that the new law restricts our right to strike even more than National's anti-worker Employment Contracts Act.

● Today, NZ workers don't have the legal right to strike over anything except an expired job contract or an urgent health risk.

● Under Labour's law, workers are outlaws if we strike against unfair government policies, or pollution of the environment, or police violence against picketers, or unjust wars, or racist and sexist abuses, or anything else you can name. That means we can't even legally stop work to protest against this unjust law.

● If workers defy the law, we're liable for three months' jail, a \$40,000 fine and the confiscation of assets, such as our homes. These penalties are harsher than under National.

● But the times are changing. NZ workers are starting to stand up. There's more strikes, some illegal. A growing number of strikes are for new gains, not just to hold onto the little we've got left after two decades of defeats for our side. There's more confidence among workers alongside real anger at corporate arrogance.

● It's time for workers to unite and fight for the right to strike. Winning this right is key to becoming human beings, rather than wage slaves. That's why Socialist Worker urges all grassroots people to join the freedom to strike campaign.

'You get what you fight for'

The last three months of 2001 saw more strike days than in the whole of 1998, 1999 and 2000 combined.

And a growing number of strikes are attempts to win new gains, such as extended union coverage and pay rises higher than inflation.

Secondary teachers voted down their own union leadership's compromise pay deal and, on 1 March, went on strike against the government. More actions are to come later.

In the words of teacher activist John Minto, "the sympathies that teachers had with the Labour government have evaporated pretty rapidly, despite the leadership of the teachers' union being very closely tied to the Labour Party".

Minto sees a "growing mood of confidence" among both teachers and other workers.

This mood was evident among Wellington railworkers when, on 28 February, they walked out over the sacking of a workmate. Such a strike is illegal under Labour's law.

However, the railworkers forced their boss to promise that nobody would be penalised under the law or lose any pay for striking. And the sacking case was sent to mediation, giving a chance for this worker.

Auckland watersiders have recently gained a 13% pay rise and a contract that, for the first time in a decade, unionises all casuals and part-timers. This victory followed a three-day strike.

"The last strike was 15 or 20 years ago," reports watersiders' delegate Dave Phillips. "No longer are the guys going to be kicked around."

Labour's employment law is only "a very, very slight improvement on what we've had over the past ten years," says Phillips. "I'm not an ad-



vocate of the government. To me, they haven't looked after anybody [in the working class]. We've had to do it ourselves."

Strikes, legal and illegal, are vital to improving the position of workers. And it's not just about pay. You begin to feel human when you unite with other workers, go on strike and force the boss to treat you with a little respect.

"You're working for a heartless company that doesn't give a shit about the average bloke," says Phillips. But, after the watersiders' strike, "we've made the company realise that no longer are they the big boss with the stick".

Strikes give a glimpse of the potential power of workers to reshape the whole of society.

Collective mass actions are what will undermine the

greedy capitalist system, which cares only about the profits and power of an elite.

What we need is a democratic and co-operative system that cares for people and the planet. That's worth fighting for. And, as Minto says, "you get what you fight for".

For all these reasons, the ruling elite hates strikes. That's why Helen Clark's government has restricted our right to strike even more than National did.

We won't win the right to strike by just appealing to Labour. They're listening to business, not to workers.

We will win by doing two things:

■ Building a mass campaign that makes the right to strike into a big issue.

■ Being prepared to ignore the law when necessary and go on illegal strikes.

Freedom to Strike Petition...

- We believe workers should have the legal right to strike over social and economic issues (as called for by NZ's union centre, the Council of Trade Unions).
- We call on the Labour-led government to reverse its ban on most types of strikes. We want the freedom to strike over issues like job losses, government policies, sexism and racism, damage to the environment, victimisation of workers and support for others in struggle.

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★ Take the petition around your workmates and neighbours. Return it to **Socialist Worker, PO Box 13-685, Auckland**. Contact us for more copies.

Lobby the Labour Party conference

The election year conference of the Labour Party is a great opportunity to focus attention on the massive legal restrictions on strikes.

It's also a chance for other key issues to be publicised, such as opposition to corporate globalisation, US war moves and genetic engineering.

Socialist Worker is proposing a mass lobby outside Labour's conference around issues like these.

We would like to see a wide range of

grassroots organisations protesting against corporate power.

We are also suggesting a counter-conference which features grassroots alternatives.

To get such a mass lobby off the ground will require the help of workers and students, community activists and Green and Alliance members.

For instance, if workers pass freedom to strike resolutions in their unions, these can be taken to the lobby.

The Labour Party conference is in Wellington on 18-19 May. The lobby will take place on the first day, and the counter-conference the day before.

Socialist Worker wants to hear from everyone interested in building a broad lobby and a counter-conference.

Contact Socialist Worker secretary Grant Morgan:

- gcm@actrix.gen.nz
- (09) 634 3377 (days & evenings)
- Box 13-685 Auckland

Move freedom to strike motion

Workers should move freedom to strike resolutions in their unions.

The wording of motions can be based on Socialist Worker's petition. Notify us of the result so it can be publicised.

Our petition has been officially endorsed by the national leadership of the Council of Trade Unions and the University Students Association.

As well, over one hundred prominent unionists and leftists have endorsed our petition on an individual basis.

They include officials from 16 unions: • Service & Food Workers Union • Nurses Organisation • National Distribution Union • Association of Staff in Tertiary Education • Northern Amalgamated Workers Union • Public Service Association • Engineers Union • Manufacturing & Construction Union • Educational Institute • Waterfront Workers Union • Tertiary Institutes Allied Staff Association • Postal Workers Union • Seafarers Union • Writers Guild • Footwear Workers Union • Unite.

Strike out nuclear war!

George W. Bush has told the US military to prepare plans for nuclear attacks on seven countries.

They are China, Russia, Iraq, North Korea, Iran, Libya and Syria.

This nuclear madness is an extension of the US "war on terror".

It's the US state that is terrorising the world.

American forces have attacked scores of countries in recent years. This military aggression is to boost the profits of US corporations.

The alternative to such capitalist brutality is now in the making.

Huge anti-war protests have erupted across the world, including 300,000 on a peace march in Italy late last year.

On 17 March, half a million people went on an anti-capitalist mobilisation in the Spanish city of Barcelona.

Around the globe, workers' strikes and grassroots revolts are challenging corporate power.

Yet, here in New Zealand, it would be illegal for workers to strike against the US president's nuclear madness.

The right to strike is more restricted in New Zealand than in any other Western country.

It's time to claim our right to strike. We will need it to join international protests against the US state's war moves.



Anti-war protest in London

PARTNERS?

Some union leaders describe business, government and unions as "social partners".

But is this description true?

In 1984, Labour inflicted Rogernomics on an unsuspecting working class.

In the years since, the top 5% have enjoyed a 25% rise in income. But the bottom 80% are worse off.

Today, 2.4 million NZers get less than \$38,000 a year, while 1,100 fat cats collect over a million each.

Helen Clark's government is promoting "free trade" deals with other countries. This market extremism means that the flow of wealth from the bottom of society to the top must continue.

The government is using NZ troops in Afghanistan as a bargaining chip in "free trade" talks with Washington. This ties NZ workers into US war moves while threatening local jobs and pay.

The wealthy elite applaud Labour's commitment to "more market" policies and a military alliance with the US state.

Clearly, government and business are "social partners".

But to include unions in this "partnership" means to deny that workers are being hurt by the system.

Workers grow strong by united struggles against bosses and their governments.

Helen Clark's government supports "free trade" but opposes freedom to strike. They know strikes are good for workers but bad for bosses.

Workers must campaign hard for the right to strike. This will help build strong unions.

Contact Socialist Worker now and join the campaign.

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- ☐ I want to attend a socialist meeting ☐ I want to join the Socialist Workers Organisation
☐ I want to subscribe to *Socialist Worker* (posted to you each fortnight, send \$30 for a year)

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